

Evaluation of DCOF-Funded Peace Corps Youth-At-Risk Programming

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Acronyms

APCD	Assistant Peace Corps Director
AR	African Region
COPE	Community-Based Options for Protection and Empowerment
DCOF	Displaced Children and Orphans Fund
EMA	Europe and Mediterranean and Asia Region
HCN	Host Country National
IAA	Interagency Agreement
IAP	Inter-American and Pacific Region
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
PASA	Participating Agency Service Agreement
PCV	Peace Corps Volunteer
RPCV	Returned Peace Corps Volunteer
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WID	Women in Development

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Responding to Congressional initiative, the U. S. Agency for International Development established the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF) in 1989. The fund, conceived in the wake of the 1984-85 African famine crisis, was envisioned by Congressional sponsors as a dedicated reservoir of resources for children left destitute by war, famine, displacement, and natural or man-made disasters. From the beginning, there was a consensus that the children to be assisted through this effort might not necessarily be orphans, but also youth considered to be at high risk of being denied any opportunity for a normal life due to devastating circumstances beyond their control. Major categories of affected children assisted by the fund have crystalized since its inception, including the following:

- Children affected by war,
- Children orphaned by HIV/AIDS,
- Street children, and
- Children with disabilities.

Through FY 1999, the Fund had contributed more than \$74 million to programs assisting at-risk children in 28 countries. Much of that funding has been channeled through collaborative arrangements between USAID and various implementing partners, primarily nongovernmental organizations (NGO) but also international organizations such as UNICEF. Such a partnership has been in place since 1993 between USAID and the Peace Corps. It is based on the proposition that USAID's financial resources and the Peace Corps' capacity to work at the community level form a logical platform from which to directly reach children at risk, as specifically intended under DCOF's authorizing language.

This report was the result of an evaluation of the collaboration between USAID and the Peace Corps in implementing DCOF-funded activities. The evaluation primarily explored the impact the partnership has had on intended beneficiaries, but also examined each agency's assessments of this joint effort and the vitality of their partnership. The evaluation, the first conducted on the Participating Agency Service Agreement (PASA) which frames USAID/Peace Corps at-risk youth programming, was undertaken by an independent consultant with considerable awareness of the fund and its purposes. The review was undertaken in March 2000.

The primary findings of the evaluation are summarized as follows:

- Peace Corps at-risk youth programming supported by DCOF resources is delivering a substantial series of high impact interventions that reach the intended beneficiaries;
- The "main streaming" of at-risk youth components into primary programming areas at the Peace Corps serves to multiply the impact of DCOF funding;

- The leveraging of resources beyond DCOF by the Peace Corps to address at-risk youth problems and opportunities is significant and enlarges the impact of the core funding;
- The programmatic and fiscal reporting on at-risk youth programming by the Peace Corps is regrettably inconsistent and unclear, denying its professional staff and volunteers a clear vision of what is being accomplished, and denying USAID officials a focused view of the return on their investment;
- The differences between at-risk youth and youth suffering from poverty or general lack of societal development are inconsistently articulated and understood within the Peace Corps, creating confusion for staff and volunteers and a sense of “mission drift”;
- Clear, concise, and pro-active guidance on what the DCOF funding is for and what it is achieving in many corners of the globe is missing in the Peace Corps’ Center for Field Assistance and Applied Research (the Center) communications to the field;
- The slow pace of the Peace Corps to program more DCOF resources into Africa is nearly inexplicable given both urgent needs and the historical origin of the Fund; and
- Political and budgetary realities require a re-doubled effort on the part of the Peace Corps to demonstrate solid and relevant impact from DCOF funding if USAID can be expected to continue to support the current partnership on assisting at-risk youth.

The Peace Corps is failing to adequately capture – or least consistently capture – the substantial impact of its work in the at-risk youth arena and to parley its successes into a more appreciated relationship with USAID officials. Part of that failure rests with the nature of PASAs and will presumably be addressed in part as the Interagency Agreement (IAA) mechanism entered into by Peace Corps and USAID subsumes the existing arrangement. But the shift to the IAA will not by itself resolve the programmatic and fiscal reporting deficiencies without concerted and ongoing effort at the Peace Corps.

More accurate and informative reporting on at-risk youth programming and articulation of the essence of that programming is valuable and necessary, not simply to solidify the USAID/Peace Corps relationship, but also to enable the Peace Corps to expand its impact in an area that seems to be a natural fit.

A following list of recommendations emerged from the evaluation’s findings:

1) The Peace Corps should consider commissioning a special report that builds from this evaluation in documenting and highlighting the solid results of its at-risk youth initiatives, underscoring the sustainable nature of many of these efforts, and detailing the leveraging of resources realized. The report should be structured to clearly convey the many successes realized by outside readers—at USAID, in the Congress, elsewhere—to Peace Corps staff, volunteers, and host country counterparts.

2) The Peace Corps needs to improve its programmatic and fiscal reporting on DCOF-supported activities to better capture results and more clearly distinguish these efforts from more general youth development activities. The transition to the IAA mechanism and the Peace Corps' verbal commitment to better report processes across the board are noted, but the need to move decisively to address this issue cannot be overstated. The Peace Corps needs to better convey the purpose of activities reported.

3) A clear and concise statement on the Peace Corps' strategy on using DCOF funds with examples of appropriate programming (which presumably would flow from the special report referred to above) needs to be reformulated and proactively shared with the field. At-risk youth and more general youth development initiatives can co-exist and be highly complementary; they are, however, distinct, and the focus on what DCOF resources can and cannot support needs to be sharpened.

4) Efforts need to be redoubled at the Peace Corps to place more of an emphasis on DCOF-supported initiatives in Africa. The presence of the Peace Corps in countries such as Mozambique and its potential return to others such as Uganda and Ethiopia, provide good opportunities for contingency planning of efforts relevant to the Fund, such as assistance to former children soldiers, young victims of land mines and civil strife, children at risk of HIV/AIDS, and the like. In these countries and many others in Africa, it is hard to see how such efforts would not be immediately central to the Peace Corps's basic in-country mission. Such an emphasis would serve to increase the relevance of Peace Corps activities to DCOF's mandate in the eyes of USAID officials and Congressional overseers.

5) Good communication is always two-sided, and USAID would add to the value of improved formal reporting on the part of the Peace Corps by encouraging periodic informal-though-structured reviews of the collaborative effort around DCOF in which intentions and requirements are underscored and progress and success are noted. Peace Corps staff and volunteers speak enthusiastically for youth-at-risk programming, which shows its evolving importance at the agency, enthusiasm which no reporting process is likely to convey. USAID officials would benefit from increased exposure to the implementation of Peace Corps activities relevant to DCOF.

Discussion: DCOF-Funded Peace Corps At-Risk Youth Program

Evaluation Process

This report constitutes the first evaluation of activities undertaken under the Displaced Children and Orphans Fund (DCOF), via the Participating Agency Service Agreement (PASA), formulated in 1993, which links United States Agency for International Development (USAID) funding and Peace Corps implementation. The evaluator offers the experience of some 23 years' engagement in international development efforts, including a long stint on a Congressional committee that incorporated first-hand exposure to the creation of the fund in the 1980s.

The methodology for conducting the evaluation centered around comprehensive series of interviews with USAID and Peace Corps officials in Washington and by telephone with those in the field, as well as with present and former Peace Corps volunteers (PCV). Informed individuals outside the two agencies were also consulted and multiple documents were reviewed. Peace Corps officials and volunteers afforded the evaluator total cooperation, candor, and access to all information sought; the significant time and effort devoted by them to making the effort comprehensive was critical to the study's smooth conduct.

Peace Corps At-Risk Youth Activities Supported by the PASA

Over the past seven years, the USAID/Peace Corps PASA has enabled Peace Corps Volunteers to implement hundreds of small projects reaching tens of thousands of at-risk children in all regions of the world. Illustratively, in FY 1999, 363 volunteers and 96 staff members were directly engaged in implementing activities for at-risk youth. These activities were both primary and secondary assignments for the volunteers. Some 376 host country nationals (HCN) were also engaged in these activities and an additional 423 youth leaders were involved in training programs. Peace Corps posts in 26 nations participated in or implemented activities at least partially funded by the PASA. Including expenditures through the center, a total of \$153,822 in PASA funding was used in FY 1999. Peace Corps data indicates that targeted field projects averaged \$4,136 in direct cost. The level of activity seen in FY 1999 is typical of that realized over the past six years of programming under the PASA. (In FY 1993, there was no expenditure of PASA funds; since then, spending has ranged from \$69,350 in FY 1994 to a high of \$163,820 in FY 1997.)

A primary use of the PASA funding is to conduct training workshops for staff, volunteers and host country nationals. Funds are also used for materials development (training manuals, etc.) and for needs assessments and project design workshops. The inclusion of host country counterparts is an important aspect of the strategy employed by the Peace Corps to permanently increase human capacity in affected communities. In the last fiscal year, five Peace Corps posts in Africa utilized funds from the PASA, as did four in the Europe Mediterranean and Asia region (EMA) and 17 in the Inter-American and Pacific region (IAP).

Regional activities are a key element in programming at-risk youth activities. A July 1999 “Youth and the Environment Workshop,” brought together host country national staff members from Belize, Bolivia, Costa Rica, the Eastern Caribbean, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, and the Philippines; Peace Corps headquarter specialists; and international development agency representatives to explore lessons learned in integrating environment and youth activities. Global programming accounted for \$24,170 of expenditures in FY 1999.

A “life planning skills workshop” in Costa Rica serves as a good example of the activities supported by the PASA. This five-day workshop entailed the training of trainers, both volunteers, and host country counterparts, and intended to promote employment prospects for abused and neglected youth. The training enabled the Volunteers and HCNs to conduct workshops at group homes and in their particular communities and local schools, and to improve working relationships with government agencies and non-profit organizations.

The FY 1999 Final Activities Report submitted to USAID by the Peace Corps in March 2000 describes such country-specific and regional activities.

The charts displayed in Appendix D of this report detail spending patterns surrounding the at-risk youth activities carried out by the Peace Corps since 1993. According to Peace Corps data, “youth development” program spending by the agency from FY 1993 through FY 1999 totaled over \$1.5 million, with \$751,780 of that sum being PASA money and \$810,254 coming from its own appropriated funds. Of the PASA total, \$189,263—or 25 percent—has gone toward administrative costs, including overhead and the partial funding (on a declining basis that has now reached zero) of the salary and benefits of the youth development coordinator¹ assigned to the center. Forty-two percent of the PASA funds have supported activities in IAP countries, 11 percent in EMA, and 16 percent in Africa, while global activities have accounted for 6 percent of the expenditures over seven years.

An illustration of the diverse activities supported by the PASA is provided in Bolivia, a country where at-risk youth programming has been of special interest to USAID² and the Peace Corps. PCVs and HCNs in Bolivia have helped rural schools launch or revamp libraries, started carpentry workshops at homes for disabled children, supported microenterprise activities for young girls to discourage them from prostitution, and founded a children’s museum with a medical facility for marginal youth. In addition, latrine projects at schools have improved health standards for students and the construction and management of multiple greenhouses in the high plateaus of that country has addressed nutritional deficits in the local diet and generated income

¹ Paul M. Sully, Community and Youth Development Program Specialist in the Center for Field Assistance and Applied Research. Mr. Sully acts as the Peace Corps’ *de facto* coordinator of at-risk youth programming supported through the DCOF PASA.

² At one point there was a separate in-country PASA for at-risk youth programming in Bolivia.

for the youths working in them. Bolivia accounts for 18 percent of at-risk youth DCOF programming expenditures for the Peace Corps from 1993 through 1999.

Program Management

In discussions with Peace Corps officials, agency officials have emphasized the decentralized nature of the agency and the fact that initiatives and programs emerge from the field. “Our programmatic priorities all emerge from the field—from staff, PCVs, host government interests, counterpart NGOs, etc. This headquarters exists to support the field work of the Peace Corps,” a senior official said. That theme dominated explorations as to why, for example, at-risk youth programming was relatively sparse in African and heavy in IAP countries—several individuals indicated there has been more demand from the latter.

In part, one senior official said, the lack of focus on Africa “is just part of the culture of the Peace Corps. IAP simply got to the concept earlier and got it stronger. Models are developed, then they spread. It is very decentralized here.” There has been, however, extensive promotion and shaping of at-risk youth activities from the Center through the work of the program coordinator, in place from the inception of the PASA in 1993. The coordinator, Mr. Sully, speaks of his role as being “both responsive to the field and pro-active in promoting at-risk youth initiatives.” Consultations with senior Peace Corps officials, volunteers, HCNs, and others in Washington and the field validate his self-assessment. “Paul Sully’s vision and energy and devotion has propelled us in this area. He has been a mentor to the field staff,” said one IAP official. “There is a definite ‘buy-in’ at Peace Corps headquarters on youth development as a priority. Paul Sully’s leadership has been effective,” said a training specialist. “He got at-risk youth on the radar screen at the Peace Corps. That’s his biggest product. More PCVs want to do youth development work now,” remarked a former center official.

While some staff members and PCVs are more vague on the connection between the work of the coordinator and the implementation of field projects, there appears to be a resounding faith in the leadership of Mr. Sully within the ranks of the Peace Corps structure. Mr. Sully points to the widespread integration of at-risk youth programming into core priority areas of concentration for the Peace Corps—education, health, the environment, agriculture, income generation, etc.—as a critical area in which to judge the management of the effort. Another prime area would be the impact of the direct interventions. In both cases, he asserts, the management of the effort has succeeded. Both questions are explored below, and in both cases management—as measured by delivery of valuable products—is deemed to be highly successful.

Requests for PASA funding for at-risk youth activities come to the center from Peace Corps posts in the field. Cost-sharing is involved in virtually all cases. (It is ironic that field contributions to at-risk youth programming from Peace Corps-appropriated funds cannot be accurately recorded due to the fiscal reporting processes in place. The evaluator was told that if those expenditures were reported, the total for Peace Corps appropriated funds being allocated to

at-risk youth programming would increase approximately 40 percent.) In reference to programmatic and fiscal reporting, the program coordinator speaks of “more orderly processes being on-line.”

PASA-to-Interagency Agreement Transition

PASA mechanisms linking USAID and the Peace Corps have contributed to whatever failures to communicate exist between the two agencies, although those failures are not unique to the at-risk youth program area. “The requirements for reporting are less strident due to this linkage being a PASA rather than a grant,” a USAID representative remarked. “Much of the difficulty is related to communication, not substance,” an informed observer familiar with the workings of PASAs commented. The PASA reporting requirements resulted in “no harmonics between us and USAID,” a senior Peace Corps official stated. There was “a sense we had to consolidate the relationship or forget it,” the official continued, in reference to the decision to include the various existing PASAs into an Interagency Agreement, a step which has now been accomplished.³

USAID has been frustrated by the perceived slowness of expenditures of at-risk youth funds on the part of the Peace Corps and the resulting bulge in the fiscal pipeline. The Peace Corps moves money through “authorizations to spend” that have no corresponding category in USAID’s fiscal systems. It has been hard for USAID officials to gauge programmatic logic due to seeming inactivity followed by relative bursts in spending.

An extreme example of the fiscal reporting disparities between USAID and the Peace Corps through the PASA process emerged during consultation with the Peace Corps’ African health specialist. This official reported that when she assumed her duties some six months ago, USAID counterparts understood that she had approximately \$835,000 in unspent funds, while a Peace Corps budget officer told her that \$30,000 remained in the account and that the coordinator of the partnership development unit indicated that something close to \$500,000 was available. While most disparities are not as bewildering as that example, there clearly has been significant ongoing frustration over the difficulties in achieving any semblance of mutual understanding of the flow of money through the PASA.

Programmatic reporting under the PASA has likewise been frustrating and not very productive. Again, the results framework process utilized by USAID has not had corresponding Peace Corps counterparts and much of the reporting provided has been of marginal use for USAID officials. Results framework questions aside, reporting by the Peace Corps has tended to provide scant linkage between activities and purpose. Peace Corps reporting has also tended to be overly anecdotal and circumstantial.

³ For a full discussion of the various problems encountered under the PASA mechanisms, see “USAID/Peace Corps Collaboration, Reengineered,” a December 1998 report submitted by Management Systems, Inc., to USAID’s Global Bureau.

USAID and the Peace Corps signed an Interagency Agreement mechanism in August of 1999 to frame a series of Small Project Assistance activities, including at-risk youth programming. The gradual transition to compatible reporting formats, programmatic and fiscal, envisioned under the IAA offers the potential of reducing the friction over reporting between the two agencies. The Peace Corps will need to take decisive and proactive steps to realize that objective, however, as the shortcoming in reporting on at-risk youth programming is more than a mechanical issue.

Identifiable Results

After six years of program funding through the PASA, a solid series of highly relevant programmatic interventions targeting at-risk youth have been implemented by PCVs and HCNs. These activities, undertaken in diverse regions of the world and illustrative of the Peace Corps' ability to reach intended beneficiaries directly in the communities where they reside, serve to validate the collaboration between USAID and the Peace Corps under DCOF. Several examples illuminate the discussion of what has been achieved and what is being tackled.

- In the Philippines, the Peace Corps is working with children who have been abandoned by their families and who are out of school. The program pulls these youths in from the streets and provides them with training for productive work and orientation to the education process so they can return to school.
- Also in the Philippines, a youth conservation corps has been formed to engage out-of-school youth in environmental projects and prepare them for employment options. Peace Corps officials report that the entire concept is being made indigenous.
- On Josina Machel Island off the coast of Mozambique, the Peace Corps is implementing a project for the psychological rehabilitation of young victims and perpetrators of war crimes during the country's long civil war. Also in Mozambique, the Peace Corps will be working with youth at-risk of HIV/AIDS and on landmine awareness efforts.
- Kumasi, Ghana, is the site of a Peace Corps grassroots literacy project for street children and other marginalized youth who have never attended school. The project boasts a 250 percent increase in the enrollment of female students since 1998. In 1999, 15 youth completed their training and received diplomas from the Ghana Non-Formal Education program.
- One hundred twenty-three disabled youth participated in a mini-camp sponsored by the Peace Corps-organized Hospital for Rehabilitation and Development of Children in Nepal.
- In Jamaica, PCVs are working—at no small danger to themselves—directly with troubled urban youth at high risk of being sucked into a world of drug dealing and street gang life by encouraging them to seek more positive opportunities. The Jamaican projects are proudly described as “cutting edge work” by some within the agency.

- PCVs in the Ukrainian city of Odessa have organized community sponsorship and organization of camps and community excursions for over 100 orphaned youths.

In 2001, Peace Corps anticipates publishing “Working with Youth: A Handbook for Volunteers,” a compilation of success stories. This will be followed with the publication of a trainer’s guide.

Analysis: Successes and Shortcomings

Interventions with Direct Impact

The interventions undertaken to assist at-risk youth provide the measurement of the value and the validity of the USAID/Peace Corps partnership via the DCOF PASA. The beneficial impacts being realized by the activities supported by the PASA are clear: the benefits are both direct, with at-risk youth being reached by PCVs through relevant programs, and sustainable, through the engagement and involvement of communities in structuring long-term processes to address the needs of vulnerable youth.

The direct impact success of various Peace Corps projects is briefly illustrated above and more fully in the background materials reviewed for this evaluation. Numerous other credible examples were cited by staff and current and former volunteers in interviews, and there is a sense that the cumulative gravity of these interventions is strong and getting stronger. Likewise, there is a sense of momentum building within the Peace Corps as more and more staff members, volunteers, and HCNs comprehend and endorse the rationale for at-risk youth programming.

In project after project, the Peace Corps is successfully involving community leaders in identifying measures to assist at-risk youth and in mobilizing resources to support those measures. In Samoa, the Peace Corps is working with a group of mayors to institutionalize at-risk youth programming. The Youth Conservation Corps activities in the Philippines supported by the Peace Corps have laid the foundation for an important initiative that should grow and strengthen under local leadership and resource mobilization. An NGO has been formed and registered in Panama to work on youth development activities as a direct result of a Peace Corps-funded workshop on the topic.

In Paraguay, the Peace Corps has involved HCNs and local youths in various workshops focusing on youth counseling and job-skill building efforts. From these efforts, models are emerging to engage local youth leaders in community-based educational efforts on the avoidance of AIDS and other Sexually-Transmitted Diseases. A prime objective of the Peace Corps as it phases out of operations in Costa Rica is to leave at-risk youth programming institutionalized within the National Youth Development Coordinating Agency as a focus of the national volunteerism organization and its local branches. It should be noted that as the agency phases out of Costa Rica, the DCOF-supported at-risk youth program is the sole effort currently being implemented, purportedly at the request of the nation's president.

Malawi offers another example of a sustainable programmatic initiative supported by the Peace Corps. Community-Based Options for Protection and Empowerment (COPE) is a program in Malawi with an HIV/AIDS focus originally supported by Save the Children Foundation and the Peace Corps. It has featured from the beginning strong collaborative relationships with committees of local leaders and has expanded its operations from one to four districts in the country. Training provided by PCVs has contributed considerably to the professionalism of

COPE's local leaders, a prominent Malawian NGO official asserted in an interview. "I absolutely would welcome further Peace Corps involvement in this effort," he added.

The evidence is convincing that a significant number of Peace Corps interventions on behalf of at-risk youth have had discernable impacts. Further, there are multiple examples to be cited where these efforts are contributing to the emergence of indigenous processes and systems to address the problems of youth living on the fringes of society.

Main Streaming of At-Risk Youth Programming at the Peace Corps

An indirect but hugely significant measurement of the impact of the DCOF PASA is the extent to which it has landed at-risk youth (and more general youth development) programming firmly on the short list of Peace Corps priorities. The extent of youth programming at the agency—both direct and as a major component of other core activities—is vast, and credit for its elevation as a priority is generally given to the Peace Corps' experience with DCOF and to the PASA's manager.

In response to an inquiry about the ultimate value of the DCOF PASA at the Peace Corps, a former senior staff member said: "The most important product has been the main streaming of youth development into all other sectors of focus at the agency. The PASA got youth development into the political focus of the Peace Corps Director. It has created incredible momentum; it has lead to significant leveraging of resources. Youth development is on the radar screen now and more PCVs want to engage in this work."

Officials indicate that Peace Corps HIV/AIDS activities would not be nearly as extensive as they are without "the spur" of DCOF-funded projects. There is, it was stated, a growing trend in the Peace Corps to focus health activities in general on youth. An education specialist for the Africa region said that in Tanzania the Peace Corps focus in on

"Much of the work supported by the PASA is dynamic and exciting. The Peace Corps is moving across the board to incorporate youth participants in every sector."

Peace Corps Official

secondary education, the environment and health, and that in all cases "youth is the driving force" that makes them work. In Mozambique, there is growing interest in a non-formal education program that will focus on girls and those affected by land mines and other residue of the former civil war. A DCOF-funded workshop scheduled for July 2000 is meant to solidify plans for this initiative.

The Peace Corps' Women-in-Development (WID) coordinator points to close collaboration and coordination between her office and at-risk youth activities, referring to "much overlap" between efforts. She cited an example of how PCVs in Bulgaria are working with a local WID committee on a project for orphans—which is not funded through the DCOF PASA. "We have seen lots more work on orphans over the past year or so," she said, and then indicated that she knew of

“no failures” in the youth-at-risk programming area. She cited projects in the Dominican Republic that engaged 23 female orphans in computer skills training and the prevention of AIDS and domestic violence.

“There is a definite buy-in at Peace Corps headquarters on youth development as an overall priority. This is due to Paul Sully’s effective leadership,” a senior training officer said. “This PASA funding is so critical for what we are doing here. It leads to so much else,” the official added.

An agriculturalist specialist for the IAP Region spoke of “buy-ins” from other sectors into the rural youth activities undertaken in Panama with PASA support. “Now we are seeing complementary events in several specific countries. These at-risk youth efforts have had a real multiplier effect. They have been instrumental in leveraging follow-on activities,” he said.

Asked what percentage of the PCVs in Paraguay were engaged in at-risk youth activities or in more general youth development activities, the assistant Peace Corps director (APCD) stated “all of our volunteers are engaged in these efforts. It is our primary area of focus. It is a mandatory assignment for the volunteers.” She cited the huge percentage of the country’s population that is below 30 years of age as making the focus “an obvious choice.” She also said that “at least 90 percent of local participants in our workshops on youth development stay involved. We are having impressive results.”

A statistic from the IAP Region is telling on the main streaming of youth programming at the Peace Corps. “We went from a handful of projects to 14 full-fledged programs involving 238 PCVs exclusively devoted to these efforts—some 12 or 13 percent of the entire pool of volunteers in the region. Our investment is some \$9.9 million per year in this area,” the evaluator was told. “The DCOF PASA, and the ones for AIDS and the Environment, have vastly expanded our programmatic reach and impact,” a senior training advisor said.

Senior management in the Peace Corps’ Africa region spoke positively of the impact of DCOF-supported activities and of their promotion by Mr. Sully. “He has rearranged the furniture in my head and in the Africa Region,” one official stated.

Mr. Sully says the main streaming of at-risk youth programming into the core areas of emphasis of the Peace Corps is one of the most significant indicators of success under the PASA. The evidence examined by the evaluator supports that conclusion: in country after country, DCOF-supported interventions have spurred the agency to place an ever higher degree of emphasis on at-risk youth activities as a direct and indirect means of achieving its broadest goals and objectives.

Leveraging of Resources by Peace Corps

Parallel to the main streaming of at-risk youth programming into the core areas of focus at the

Peace Corps is the considerable leveraging of resources provided through DCOF. The Peace Corps is effectively parleying the modest but critical dollar transfer through the PASA into substantial programmatic initiatives involving not just the deployment of volunteers, but the budgeting of non-DCOF funds for at-risk youth programs and strategic alliances with other players that extends the reach of the resources provided by USAID. There are several illustrations of this achievement.

Non-DCOF funds are being utilized by the Peace Corps for youth at-risk programs in the Kyrgyz Republic, Bulgaria, the Dominican Republic, and many other areas. Frequently, such programs are “add ons” for volunteers working in the business, education, or health fields. The Bulgarian example is an effort to guide young orphaned girls away from prostitution.

Budget figures underscore the level of Peace Corps programming that goes beyond that supported by DCOF. Cumulative spending of DCOF funds through the PASA from FY 1993 through FY 1999 totals \$751,780, while the expenditure of Peace Corps appropriated funds for at-risk youth for the same period equals \$810,255. This means the PASA has leveraged an additional Peace Corps expenditure, equaling approximately 108 percent of the DCOF contribution.⁴

Peace Corps officials point to the formation of local NGOs dedicated to working with at-risk youth and the establishment of networks for such NGOs in a number of locations as solid examples of the leveraging being achieved. The examples cited in Panama, Costa Rica, and elsewhere are numerous and credible. In Costa Rica, the Peace Corps sees institutionalized at-risk youth programming in two national entities as its prime legacy as it phases out of operations.

Other examples demonstrate how the Peace Corps has leveraged resources. The Peace Corps considers itself to be a guiding force in the establishment of the Inter-America Working Group on Youth Development, a consortium of eight development organizations, and points to the rising funding for at-risk youth programming by the Inter-American Development Bank as significant.

“The leveraging impact of the PASA is hard to overstate. The money attracts great proposals.”

Peace Corps Official

Harder to quantify, but of considerable importance, is the cadre of trained and motivated individuals dedicated to working with at-risk youth that has emerged from Peace Corps training workshops and field projects. A large number of HCNs now acting as managers and stewards of at-risk youth initiatives trace their professional roots to exposure to Peace Corps efforts in this area. The benefits of their efforts will resonate for many years in many diverse locations around

⁴ These numbers do not reflect the direct expenditure of funds by Peace Corps posts in the field for at-risk youth program activities, which if captured would boost the Peace Corps contribution. The lack of precision within the agency in distinguishing between at-risk youth activities and youth development efforts makes all budgetary numbers problematic.

the globe.

A number of valid measurements show that the Peace Corps has successfully used the core funding provided through the PASA to significantly expand the ultimate impact of its efforts to assist at-risk youth beyond the efforts suggested by the dollars expended.

African Emphasis

DCOF was structured in direct response to the suffering of African children. USAID officials, responsive to Congressional intentions and oversight, have emphasized the special needs of at-risk youth in Africa across the board in their management of the Fund. For a number of reasons, however, the Peace Corps has not mirrored that emphasis in its programming of DCOF resources. According to Peace Corps officials, the following factors have contributed to the phenomenon:

- The basic education systems in Africa are in acute distress, providing less of a platform from which PCVs can reach at-risk youth;
- Peace Corps weakness at coping with the relative lack of structure in the African educational sphere;
- Fewer functional governmental agencies and indigenous NGOs with which to work in Africa than elsewhere;
- PCVs tend to work in rural communities in Africa, away from concentrations of at-risk youth;
- Political realities that have driven the Peace Corps out of Ethiopia, Uganda, and other countries where DCOF-supported activities would be priorities; and
- A general lack of support at the top management levels of the agency for moving the emphasis of at-risk youth programming beyond the IAP region.

Consequently, contrary to assumptions in play elsewhere, Africa has had comparatively few at-risk youth programming initiatives and modest expenditures of funds. In FY 1999, there were five Peace Corps posts in Africa utilizing DCOF funds, compared with 17 in IAP. Likewise, EMA has had little emphasis; there were four EMA posts using DCOF resources last fiscal year. For the same year, a total of \$22,195 of DCOF money was allocated for Africa, versus \$83,340 for IAP.

The factors cited here, plus the decentralized, field-oriented nature of the Peace Corps alluded to above, are deemed valid by the evaluator. They are not totally convincing, however. What seems to be at least as significant is the lack of proactive determination to get DCOF on the African

map at the Peace Corps. There has been a lack of regard for the African emphasis intended by Congress, underscored by USAID, and manifestly dictated by need. While DCOF resources are not as easily programmed in Africa, the more urgent needs being experienced and the relative lack of local infrastructure across the continent argue for more vigorous and proactive efforts to increase DCOF's presence.

Peace Corps officials indicate that at-risk youth programming in Africa is destined for rapid and significant expansion. The AIDS epidemic there is a major factor in the anticipated expansion. Success stories in Africa can now serve to broadcast interest in DCOF funding; the tapping of the Fund envisioned for Mozambique referenced above is hopefully indicative of a higher awareness in the region. The senior leadership of the Africa region sees an acceleration of DCOF funding for projects to assist orphans left behind by the AIDS pandemic and to assist the increasing number of child soldiers across the continent.

The at-risk youth coordinator, Mr. Sully, says, "Africa is coming on strong now" in terms of Peace Corps programming. More energetic efforts are needed to ensure that this prediction comes true.

"African countries are crying out for at-risk youth programs. And soon they will be components of established sectors across the board there, especially in West Africa."

Peace Corps Official

Visions, Objectives, and Focus

Whether the vision of what is to be achieved through the PASA is shared by USAID and Peace Corps officials is a difficult question to answer. Because the distinction between at-risk youth and youth development programming is not consistently seen, appreciated, or applied within the Peace Corps. In reference to the children of Africa, one official said, "They are all at risk." Others voiced similar views. The lack of distinction is apparent in the written and verbal descriptions of activities, where at-risk youth and youth development programs—activities to support youth living in poverty and needing developmental interventions—are frequently lumped together. The same imprecision affects fiscal reporting.

Both USAID and the Peace Corps have wisely utilized a flexible definition of at-risk youth, and both have agreed on non-institution building approaches to reach the children in question. Within the Peace Corps, however, the flexibility in defining "at-risk" has veered toward being open-ended in some cases and contributed to a lack of focus that characterizes much of its reporting on PASA-supported activities.

Many Peace Corps officials actively engaged in project implementation can articulate a definition of at-risk youth that aligns with that used by USAID officials. "These funds are not for those needy, but for those helpless," a program specialist in the EMA region remarked. The country director in Mozambique plans to tap the DCOF funding for a series of activities clearly centered on high-risk youth—victims of war crimes, children in orphanages, out of school girls in danger of being recruited into prostitution, HIV/AIDS-affected children, children endangered by land

mines—that would resonate positively with Congressional overseers. The considerable number of “success stories” that can be reported from field activities show that officials and Volunteers grasp the special intentions of DCOF.

The PASA coordinator said the following: “Working with high risk youth has been the vision from the beginning and continues to be. But the definition of ‘at-risk’ shifts and is hard to see clearly.” The difficulty in establishing a more pronounced line of separation between at-risk youth and youth development programming—compounded by inadequate reporting—is at the core of somewhat divergent senses of what is being accomplished under the PASA by Peace Corps and USAID officials. That genuine and valid sense of significant accomplishment in reaching at-risk youth widely shared by the Peace Corps officials and Volunteers is not consistently appreciated by USAID counterparts, which is a contributing factor to the relatively loose definition of the target audience employed by the Peace Corps, as well as to its sometimes interchangeable use of terms that have different meanings.

The relative sparsity of at-risk youth program initiatives by the Peace Corps in Africa further contributes to divergent visions of what is to be accomplished via DCOF. USAID representatives indicate that approximately 50 percent of the PASA funds should be expended in Africa, although those expenditures have recently risen to some 16 percent. During such instances, USAID officials appear uncertain about the relevance of the Peace Corps’ contribution.

The following irony is a part of the partnership between USAID and the Peace Corps: the Peace Corps is realizing solid and substantial impacts from its at-risk youth programming initiatives, but these impacts are obscured rather than illuminated by inadequate reporting that reflects an inadequate articulated vision of goals and objectives and by slowness in replicating these impacts in Africa. The Peace Corps would serve its own interests by pointing to its youth development activities as a separate and complementary set of initiatives that have emerged from its at-risk youth programming rather than obscure critical differences and by being visibly proactive in establishing at-risk youth efforts in Africa.

Reporting

The inadequacy of programmatic and fiscal reporting by the Peace Corps to USAID on DCOF-supported activities has been underscored at several points in this evaluation. Peace Corps officials are aware of the problem and are convinced that more useful and thorough reporting systems are imminent. And there is some evidence that sharper and more detailed processes for capturing the impact of activities and linking activities with clear purpose are being constructed. What is critical, however, is not format or reporting mechanisms, but a heavier emphasis on

“The Peace Corps simply is not good at reporting. Good work falls through the cracks. Results are not tracked quantitatively and real accomplishments go unreported or misreported. Improvements are underway, but there is much to overcome.”

Peace Corps Official

content that is data-rich and more specific regarding who is being reached and what is being accomplished. More evaluation of the benefit of activities undertaken and emphasis on impact is required.

As suggested throughout this study, useful reporting is ultimately linked to a crisp and precise articulation of goals and objectives and a common understanding of purpose. This truism applies to the at-risk youth activities implemented by the Peace Corps and supported through DCOF. With minimal but proactive efforts, it would appear that officials in the center could broaden and enhance a shared vision of what the DCOF resources are meant to achieve and sharpen the profile of at-risk youth interventions the Peace Corps is implementing.

The USAID/Peace Corps Partnership on At-Risk Youth

The collaboration between USAID and the Peace Corps on the goal of reaching at-risk youth is framing a series of programmatic interventions with substantial impacts that are immediately relevant to the purposes of DCOF. The collaboration is not, however, facilitating a particularly strong sense of partnership between the principals where a common understanding of what is being accomplished is shared. That is not to say that the relationship is negative or that improvements can not be fashioned—only that it is not fully developed or appreciated at present. This is especially true on the USAID side.

The problems of programmatic and fiscal reporting discussed throughout this report have contributed considerably to the weak sense of partnership now evident. USAID officials express ongoing frustration at not being able to discern what is being

accomplished and at what cost. Beyond reporting shortcomings, however, some USAID representatives speak of their perception that the Peace Corps' senior management has not given much priority to the relationship or to being accountable for the funds provided through the PASA. Some feel that USAID is too seldom given credit for what the Peace Corps has been able to accomplish in the at-risk youth arena. A senior USAID representative commented that "the Peace Corps is not always responsive to our needs. They don't produce timely reports. Sometimes we have to ask them how much more funding they can use."

"There is good going on through this effort, but it is not always clear what it is and who it is good for."

USAID Official

Mission drift is a major fear that USAID officials express. There is a sense that the broad interpretation of "at-risk youth" employed by the Peace Corps is resulting in too many marginal activities. "We have a sense that many of the children being reached, while needy, are hard to define as being 'at-risk,'" one official said. "The Peace Corps needs to drop its world view and come up with a short list of countries where real focus can be achieved," another observer said.

The low profile of at-risk youth interventions in Africa is a major concern for USAID officials.

One indicated that “about half of this money should be spent in Africa.”⁵

Parallel to the African profile issue, USAID officials perceive a need for a more proactive approach in general to promoting DCOF-supported activities. One USAID official said, “The Peace Corps needs to better assist its volunteers in knowing about these assets, the opportunities that exist for utilizing them, and the relevant examples that underscore what we are trying to accomplish here.”

USAID representatives are candid in saying that the overall budgetary limitations they face currently make them considerably more strident in demanding accountability from their various development partners. There is an apparent but unstated sense on the part of some that the Peace Corps does not appreciate the pressures USAID is under from the Congress and that it is taking for granted funding that is no longer certain.

While Peace Corps officials spoke to the frustrations of the PASA process during this evaluation, their comments on the funding provided for at-risk youth programming through DCOF underscore a deep appreciation for what the partnership with USAID is achieving. “This effort is very important to the Peace Corps. No, it is not more bother than it is worth,” said a senior official in the center. “These funds are not a replacement for our Congressional appropriation; those funds are for supporting PCVs, not for development projects,” the official continued, who also underscored the significant increase in PCVs concentrating on at-risk youth activities. “The requests for funding under DCOF are increasing as well.”

Another senior officer in the center expressed faith that the IAA mechanism would give structure to the ad hoc systems allowed under PASAs. The official then ventured to speculate that if reliable statistics were available “the Peace Corps would blow the boat out of the water in terms of the great number of at-risk youth being targeted!” The official gave credit to DCOF activities for the growing emphasis on HIV/AIDS projects throughout the Peace Corps saying, “These activities would not be nearly as extensive without the DCOF spur.”

“Is this relationship with USAID successful? Yes, it is. The product proves that. The resources from the PASA have built capacity within the Peace Corps and helped us share that capacity with host country nationals. We are implementing real activities. We have growing momentum. We have a cadre of trained and motivated individuals engaged in this effort around the globe.”

Peace Corps Official

Both officials attributed the lack of rapport with USAID as “communications, not substance.” They, and others, then articulated a series of activities and interventions that are substantive, examples of how at-risk youth and youth development activities are being mainstreamed at the Peace Corps, and examples of how the leveraging of DCOF funds are expanding programmatic

⁵ This comment was made in the course of an interview conducted for the evaluation; it was not an official policy pronouncement.

reach.

A senior training officer spoke eloquently about the Peace Corps' at-risk youth project in Jamaica and the enormous benefits she saw coming from the effort. She asserted that there were "no failures" in the Peace Corps' initiatives in this area. "These funds are so necessary for what we are doing. I would be crushed if they were somehow lost." Her words summarized the sentiments of many at the Peace Corps—both at the Washington headquarters and in the field—who strongly conveyed a sense that momentum around at-risk youth activities was accelerating.

Concluding Summary

The Peace Corps is delivering a series of activities and interventions directly responsive to the needs of at-risk youth in a number of locations around the globe. Activities being funded through the DCOF PASA are substantive and are in many cases capable of having a significant and lasting impact on the target populations. There is considerable buy-in throughout the Peace Corps on the entire at-risk youth programming front, and the Peace Corps is leveraging DCOF resources to expand its direct reach. The initiative is being managed within the center by an official, Mr. Sully, with considerable enthusiasm for and dedication to the challenge at hand. His leadership is recognized and applauded throughout the ranks of the Peace Corps structure.

In contrast to those significant positive conclusions, there are issues requiring straightforward—a series mid-stream corrections, in effect—if the USAID/Peace Corps partnership is to strengthen. The distinction between reaching at-risk youth and more general youth development activities has to be sharpened throughout the Peace Corps. Programmatic and fiscal reporting has to improve significantly. Proactive efforts to increase the level of activity in Africa have to commence without delay.

The Peace Corps' top management needs to display a keener understanding of the political realities crowding USAID and help it demonstrate real impact from its investments in this arena. Considerable good is being accomplished through the USAID/Peace Corps partnership through DCOF. The political certitude of that partnership is diminishing, however, and the Peace Corps needs to proactively demonstrate a commitment to the joint effort if it is going to survive.

Appendix A: DCOF Cooperating Agencies

Catholic Relief Services
Hanoi, Vietnam

Christian Children's Fund
Richmond, Virginia

Health and Education Volunteers
McLean, Virginia

International Child Resource Institute
Berkeley, California

Lanka Jatika Sarvodaya
Moratuwa, Sri Lanka

Pact
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Partners for the Americas
Recife, Brazil

Peace Corps
Washington, D.C.

Pearl S. Buck Foundation
Hanoi, Vietnam

Project Concern International
San Diego, California

Red Barnet
Kampala, Uganda

Salesian Mission of Don Bosco
Negombo, Sri Lanka

Save the Children (DRC Program)
Kinshasa, DRC

Save the Children/UK
London, United Kingdom

Save the Children/US

Lilongwe, Malawi

Terre des Hommes
Nuwara Eliya, Sri Lanka

UNICEF
Monrovia, Liberia

World Concern
Hanoi, Vietnam

World Vision
Washington, D.C.

Appendix B: List of Contacts

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Appendix C: Selected Bibliography

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Appendix D: Fiscal Data

Hard copy only